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ABSTRACT

The first of two papers that comprise this document introduces Australia's response to 1990 as the United Nations (UN) International Literacy Year (ILY). The second paper sets policy directions for Australia's Literacy Year program. The first paper contains the six UN objectives for the year (to increase government action to combat illiteracy, public awareness of illiteracy, popular participation to combat illiteracy, cooperation and solidarity among member states and within the UN in the struggle against illiteracy, and to use the year for launching a plan of action for the eradication of illiteracy by the year 2000); a section on literacy in Australia; an outline of the Australian structures implementing literacy efforts; suggestions for literacy programming; and appendices that describe literacy, give reasons adults have literacy difficulties, and list the members of Australian groups guiding ILY activities. The second paper lists the aims of the National Consultative Council for International Literacy Year (to guide Australia's activities, formulate policy proposals, and promote literacy activities); states the UN objectives for the year; gives background information on illiteracy in Australia, including literacy rate, reasons adults have literacy problems, childhood literacy development, and adult learning experiences; and sets goals for the ILY program. (Among the goals are recognizing the value of reading and writing, expanding opportunities for adult learning, improving the quality of adult programs, promoting plain English, and linking various education sectors. Strategies and priority funding areas are listed and a request to launch ILY on International Literacy Day is reported. (CML)

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1990 INTERNATIONAL LITERACY YEAR--AN INTRODUCTION

International Literacy Year Paper No. 1

POLICY DIRECTIONS FOR THE INTERNATIONAL LITERACY YEAR PROGRAM

International Literacy Year Paper No. 2

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International Literacy Year Paper No. 1

1990
INTERNATIONAL LITERACY YEAR
- An Introduction

ILY SECRETARIAT
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National Consultative Council
Mrs Margaret Whitlam AO
Chairman

FOREWORD

The United Nations has declared 1990 to be International Literacy Year (ILY). The Australian Government has established a National Consultative Council to guide Australia's involvement in the Year. I have the honour of chairing the Council.

This paper has been prepared by the ILY Secretariat to serve as an introduction to the Year. I believe that it will provide you with valuable information about ILY. It is the first of a number of public documents which will be produced as planning for ILY progresses.

The Council encourages government and community bodies as well as individuals to develop plans for marking the Year. Please consider how you, or groups you are involved with, can contribute to achieving the objectives of ILY. Some ideas are suggested towards the end of this document; you may develop many more.

The promotion of active literacy for all and the development of the reading and writing skills of the nation can best be achieved through the combined efforts of government, industry, community and individuals. I urge you to become a part of this process.

Margaret Whitlam

Margaret Whitlam
8 May 1989

c/- ILY SECRETARIAT
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Foreword - Mrs Margaret Whitlam	
1.	**United Nations Objectives**	1
2.	**Australian Context**	2
3.	**Structures**	4
4.	**Programs**	5

Appendix A	Descriptions of Literacy
Appendix B	Reasons for Literacy Difficulties in the Adult Population
Appendix C	Senate Resolution on International Literacy Year
Appendix D	Membership of the National Consultative Council
Appendix E	Membership of the Commonwealth/State Implementation Working Group

1. United Nations Objectives

The United Nations General Assembly, in December 1987, designated 1990 as International Literacy Year (ILY) and invited UNESCO to assume the role of lead organisation for the preparation and observation of the Year.

The Director-General of UNESCO wrote to all member States inviting them to participate in ILY and to establish a committee to oversee implementation of activity for the Year.

The General Conference of UNESCO expressed its firm resolve that *"ILY will not consist of a set of isolated activities but will rather be a means serving essentially to stimulate greater public and government awareness and consciousness in furtherance of the objective of eradicating illiteracy by the year 2000 - in the knowledge that literacy training is not simply teaching people to read and write, but teaching them to understand so that they can live their conscious life to the full".*

The UN objectives for ILY are:

1. To increase government action to combat illiteracy;
2. To increase public awareness of the scope, nature and implications of illiteracy as well as the means and conditions for combating it;
3. To increase popular participation, within and among countries, in efforts to combat illiteracy;
4. To increase co-operation and solidarity among member States in the struggle against illiteracy;
5. To increase co-operation within the United Nations system in the struggle;
6. To use ILY for launching a plan of action for the eradication of illiteracy by the Year 2000.

2. Australian Context

Until at least the 1960s, international statistics suggested that the literacy rate in Australia was 100%. Indeed the latest data available from UNESCO sets the Australian literacy rate, for people over fifteen, at 99.1%. However, an extensive survey conducted in Sydney by Judith Goyen in the mid-1970s produced a functional illiteracy rate in English of 10.3% for people over fifteen.[1] This was made up of 3.7% of the English-speaking background population and 55.8% of the non-English-speaking population. Together these two groups total over one million people and represent a significant minority. However, such a finding should not detract from the substantial achievement made in Australia of approximately 90% functional literacy, as defined in Goyen's survey.

What do we mean by literacy? Many definitions have been offered. Basic literacy, as used in an international context, is often seen simply as the ability to write your own name. The Goyen survey took a notion of functional literacy based on a capacity to read telephone dialling instructions, classified newspaper advertisements and simple application forms. Another view is that:

> *"....literacy has to do with the ability to read and write - and handle numbers - well enough to cope with life in the society to which he or she belongs. But, for me, coping with life means something more than the ability to adjust to circumstances and get by. I take the view that, in a democratic society, I should not only be able to exercise a measure of control over the general direction in which my own life moves, but also have an interest in, and influence on, the life and development of the communities and ultimately the society to which I belong. And I would accord such rights and responsibilities to all adults."*[2]

A 1978 UNESCO definition is that:

> *"People are literate when they have acquired the essential knowledge and skills which enable them to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in their group and community, and whose attainments in reading, writing and arithmetic make it possible for them to continue to use these skills towards their own and the community's development for active participation in the life of their country."*

In any case, it must be understood that literacy is a relative concept and expectations vary according to the cultural demands of a society[3] (see Appendix A). Australia is a complex industrialised society which is now looking to major re-structuring of its economy to be less dependent on primary commodity markets and more reliant on value-added exports. This will require significant reskilling of the workforce through training programs. A considerable percentage of workers will be unable to participate effectively in retraining courses unless their basic educational capacity is developed. In fact, access to the public culture generally in Australia is severely curtailed if you cannot read and write adequately. This often brings great personal hardship and anguish to the individuals concerned. For instance, a Victorian survey in 1986 showed that 27% of adult literacy students were registered job seekers compared with the State average of 7.3%.

1. GOYEN J D, *Adult Illiteracy in Sydney* Canberra, AAAE, 1977
2. NELSON A, *Does Literacy Make a World of Difference* ACAL 9th National Conference, 1985
3. See the definition by GRANT A, in the Australian Review of Applied Linguistics, 9/2, 1986: *Literacy is a creative, selective, meaning-centred process and a relative concept, relative to different texts, social contexts and purposes.*

Australia has long had a system of compulsory schooling for children which has achieved a great deal for the country and its citizens. While new literacy demands in society have to be met, and there is always scope for some improvement in the quality of childhood learning programs, the existence of universal schooling would suggest that the major preoccupation of International Literacy Year for Australia, unlike for some other countries, might not be "combating illiteracy" among children. On the other hand, the provision of adult literacy programs in Australia is a relatively recent development, something which has occurred in the last decade or so. These programs are starting to cater for adults, who, for a variety of reasons, did not achieve literacy skills when they were children (see Appendix B).

According to the National Policy on Languages Report, some 17,000 Australians were enrolled in adult literacy programs in 1986.[4] If we assume that all these people were of English-speaking background, the maximum target-group reach is 4.5%, based on the Goyen survey extrapolated nationally. In other words, current adult literacy programs are reaching only a small percentage of those Australians in need.

In fact it is known that, while many migrants of non-English speaking background are meeting their English language needs through English as a second language programs, a considerable number who have speaking fluency in English are now joining adult literacy programs with people of English-speaking background. This means that the target reach of existing adult literacy programs for people of English-speaking background is considerably less than 4.5%.

Given the objectives of International Literacy Year, such a situation is a serious one for Australia. Moreover, poor literacy skills are often seen as a source of shame to people. This public stigma needs to be removed.

Australia is geographically part of the Asia Pacific region. According to UNESCO, there are 666 million illiterates aged 15 and over in the region, amounting to 75% of the world's illiterate population. In addition, over 100 million primary school-aged children in the region have never enrolled in school. The UNESCO APPEAL (Asia Pacific Program of Education for All) program was launched in 1987 with three aims for the year 2000: eradicate illiteracy, universalise primary education and provide the opportunity for life-long education.

Looking in more detail at Australia's near neighbours in the South Pacific sub-region, UNESCO statistics show that Papua New Guinea, for instance, has a literacy level below 50%. It will take time to alter this situation and Australia may be seen to have an on-going regional responsibility to make assistance available. It would be appropriate to use ILY in 1990 to highlight issues of concern and develop useful points of contact between Australia and its neighbours in the literacy field. These contacts could then be further developed in the future.

Literacy in the Australian context involves the whole community, as well as education authorities, in developing the reading and writing skills of the nation. As the technology used in modern life becomes more complex, the demands on the literacy capacity of individuals to cope with these changes become greater. The ability of people to think creatively and constructively is tied to their capacity to integrate speaking, listening, reading and writing with thinking. A partnership between the government and the community, including business and industry, offers the opportunity to maximise the potential of International Literacy Year for Australia.

4. LO BIANCO J, *National Policy on Languages*, Canberra, AGPS, 1987

3. Structures

The Minister for Employment, Education and Training, Mr Dawkins, has approved the establishment of a broadly representative National Consultative Council (NCC) which will meet two or three times a year for the next two years. Membership of the NCC will consist of individuals from literacy bodies, publishing, the media, industry, welfare, ethnic communities, Aboriginal communities, academia, State Governments and service organisations. The terms of reference for the NCC are:

1. To guide Australia's involvement in ILY;
2. To formulate policy proposals on literacy for consideration by Government, having regard to the need for a balanced program between national and international activities;
3. To promote literacy activities and community awareness of the importance for contemporary Australia of enhancing literacy.

A Commonwealth/State Implementation Working Group (IWG) has been established to work closely with the ILY Secretariat in co-ordinating a national response to ILY. The IWG comprises representatives of all State and Territory Governments, together with one nominee of the Conference of TAFE Directors and representatives of relevant Commonwealth agencies. The terms of reference for the IWG are:

1. To co-ordinate the activities of major Commonwealth agencies involved with ILY activities;
2. To consult with State authorities about program proposals for ILY;
3. To identify areas of need in literacy and articulate options to meet those needs;
4. To ensure that Australia's internal and international efforts in ILY are co-ordinated and mutually reinforcing.

A Secretariat was established in February 1989 within the International Division of DEET to service the National Consultative Council and Commonwealth/State Implementation Working Group as well as to prepare policy advice and implement and administer programs developed for ILY.

4. Programs

The Government's program for ILY , with funding to be made available after the August 1989/90 budget, will be developed after advice has been received from the NCC. However, the Australian Government's specific ILY activities in 1990 should be seen as additional to continuing literacy efforts by Commonwealth, State and community agencies both domestically and externally. Apart from the Government's ILY program, special activities for ILY will also be planned by these other agencies. The Government's ILY program is expected to focus on projects of national significance which can contribute to a developing strategy for literacy. Some of these projects may be carried out by State authorities. It is hoped that State Governments might make funds available for local ILY projects.

So many areas of public life are affected by people's literacy skills. They include business and industry, welfare, health and safety, community services, legal and consumer rights, publications and citizenship. Particular groups are affected in their personal and social lives in different ways. Special attention should be focused on the needs of Aboriginal people, prisoners, people with disabilities, migrants of non-English-speaking background, welfare recipients, workers-at-risk, women, youth, rurally isolated people and so on. All agencies should use plain English in written communications with their public.

The UNESCO Collective Consultation of Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) on Literacy produced a guide which suggests a number of practical activities that could be undertaken to prepare for and hold during ILY. The main criteria governing the choice of activities suggested were that they should be tangible, modest and realistic and should take account of the resource constraints faced by most organisations. The activities suggested are, therefore, inexpensive, short in duration and limited in terms of geographical coverage.

The following is a selection of suggested activities from the guide which may help planning for ILY in a constructive way:

- organise literacy-related courses and seminars;
- organise voluntary service to provide resources for literacy groups, centres or schools;
- produce texts for learners and new literates in your own areas of concern and specialisation;
- follow up and print newsworthy literacy-related stories;
- develop awards and decorations for literacy work for ILY (in literacy education, learner's achievements, promotion of literacy);
- organise a festival of films and TV programs or a travelling or stable exhibition;
- distribute posters and advertising material;
- promote your activity with sponsorship by a prominent local public figure;

- organise "open-door" days or evenings at schools or libraries;
- approach appropriate employers, entrepreneurs and the business community to become involved in ILY;
- organise "twinning" of a school, club or town in another country in the region where literacy is a recognised problem;
- encourage volunteers for literacy work through "hot-lines" or "talent-banks";
- organise fund-raising schemes to fund activities in Australia or a "twin" country in the region (read-athons, sponsorship schemes, etc).

Individuals and organisations around the country might like to consider how they can contribute to International Literacy Year 1990. International Literacy Day takes place each year on 8 September and this could be an appropriate date to launch activities or focus attention on a commitment to ILY and literacy issues.

For further information please contact the ILY Secretariat:

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ILY Secretariat
April 1989

Descriptions of Literacy

1990 will be International Literacy Year - but what is literacy? Literacy is a relative concept which encompasses a range of reading and writing skills.

In international circles, the term basic literacy is used to indicate the ability to read and write your own name. The term functional literacy means the ability to read and write well enough to accomplish simple everyday reading and writing tasks in your particular society. For Australia the goal of functional literacy in English is essential but not adequate.

Literacy involves the integration of listening, speaking, reading, writing and critical thinking; it incorporates numeracy. It includes the cultural knowledge which enables a speaker, writer or reader to recognise and use language appropriate to different social situations. For an advanced technological society such as Australia, our goal must be an active literacy which allows people to use language to enhance their capacity to think, create and question, which helps them to become more aware of the world and empowers them to participate more effectively in society.

Reasons for Literacy Difficulties in the Adult Population

One of the most common questions asked when discussing the issue of adult literacy difficulties is, "Why didn't they learn to read and write at school?"

When adults undertaking literacy courses are asked the same question the following, either singly or in combination, are just some of the reasons they list for their inability to gain adequate literacy skills during school years:

- poverty and other socio-economic barriers;
- emotional problems at home or school;
- death or absence of a parent;
- large class sizes at school;
- frequent changes of school;
- childhood illness or accident;
- undetected sight or hearing problems;
- slow development (once they have fallen behind they can't catch up);
- truancy;
- fear of failure and sense of inadequacy;
- English not their first language;
- books and reading not encouraged at home;
- lack of interest in school and learning;
- specific learning difficulties;
- rural isolation.

For some, the motivation to learn, and particularly to learn literacy skills, may not appear until adulthood when people are able to admit that the inability to read and write adequately is detrimentally affecting their lives.

Senate Resolution on International Literacy Year (ILY)

The following resolution was passed in the Senate in 1988:

That the Senate, noting 8 September 1988 as International Literacy Day -

(a) recognises that significant numbers of Australian adults have difficulties with everyday reading, writing and numeracy activities;

(b) accepts that this causes major problems for the participation of such people in society and for the contribution they can make to a more highly skilled workforce;

(c) affirms the initiatives taken by the Federal Government towards a two year adult literacy action campaign under the National Policy on Languages;

(d) urges the Government, in its preparation for International Literacy Year in 1990, to support a national charter which endorses the right of all Australians to have the opportunity to acquire literacy and numeracy as part of a lifelong learning process; and

(e) requests the Government to co-operate with the non-government sector in planning community participation to meet this need.

APPENDIX D

National Consultative Council For International Literacy Year 1990 Membership

Mrs Margaret Whitlam AO	Chairman
Professor David Andrich	Professor of Education Murdoch University
Dr Alastair Crombie	Chairperson Australian Association of Adult Education
Mr Julian Disney	National President Australian Council of Social Service
Mr David Goldsworthy	Senior Consultant (Victoria) Adult Literacy and Basic Education
Mr Colin Hollis MP	Member for Throsby
Mr John Iremonger	Publisher Allen and Unwin
Dr Phillip Jones	UNESCO National Commission
Mr Joseph Lo Bianco	Chairperson Australian Advisory Council on Languages and Multicultural Education
Oodgeroo Noonuccal	Aboriginal Poet/Writer
Ms Cassandra Parkinson	Research Co-ordinator Textile, Clothing and Footwear Industry Council of Australia
Ms Elizabeth Riddell	Journalist/Poet
Professor Malcolm Skilbeck	Vice Chancellor Deakin University
Ms Adrienne Walker	Education Officer Western Australian Ministry of Education
Dr Dick Walker	Founding Chair World Literacy Committee of Rotary International
Ms Rosie Wickert	Acting President Australian Council for Adult Literacy
Ms Rosemary Wighton AO	Chairperson Literature Board of the Australia Council

APPENDIX E

Commonwealth/State Implementation Working Group For International Literacy Year 1990 Membership

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International Literacy Year Paper No. 2

POLICY DIRECTIONS for the INTERNATIONAL LITERACY YEAR PROGRAM

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
	Foreword	
1.	**Introduction**	1
2.	**United Nations' Objectives**	1
3.	**Australian Background**	2
3.1	Descriptions of Literacy	2
3.2	Data	2
3.3	Reasons for Literacy Difficulties in the Adult Population	2
3.4	Childhood Literacy Development	3
3.5	Adult Learning Experiences	3
4.	**Goals for International Literacy Year Program**	4
4.1	Recognition of the Value of Reading and Writing	4
4.2	Enhanced School Literacy Programs	4
4.3	Expanded Learning Provision	4
4.4	Improved Quality of Adult Literacy Provision	5
4.5	Greater Public Awareness and Participation	5
4.6	International and Regional Awareness and Activities	5
4.7	Promotion of Plain English	5
4.8	Effective Links between Education Sectors	5
5.	**Strategies**	6
5.1	Australian Literacy Charter	6
5.2	Funded Program	6
5.3	State International Literacy Year Councils	6
5.4	Commonwealth and State Literacy Strategies	6
5.5	Public Awareness and Participation Strategies	7
5.6	Interaction with International and Regional Strategies	7
5.7	Plain English Strategy	7
5.8	Evaluation Strategy	7
6.	**Priority Funding Areas**	8
7.	**Launching International Literacy Year**	9

FOREWORD

Following a meeting on 13 April 1989, the National Consultative Council for International Literacy Year presented advice to the Government on policy directions for the Year.

1. INTRODUCTION

The aims of the National Consultative Council (NCC) for International Literacy Year (ILY) are contained within its terms of reference, namely:

1. To guide Australia's involvement in ILY.

2. To formulate policy proposals on literacy for consideration by Government, having regard to the need for a balanced program between national and international activities.

3. To promote literacy activities and community awareness of the importance for contemporary Australia of enhancing literacy.

Under its second term of reference, the Council has a responsibility to develop policy proposals for the Government. This paper sets out advice on general policy directions for the Year.

2. UNITED NATIONS' OBJECTIVES

The six objectives for ILY have been declared by the United Nations. In simplified form, they are:

1. To increase government action to combat illiteracy.

2. To increase public awareness of the scope, nature and implications of illiteracy as well as the means and conditions for combating it.

3. To increase popular participation, within and among countries, in efforts to combat illiteracy.

4. To increase co-operation and solidarity among member States in the struggle against illiteracy.

5. To increase co-operation within the United Nations system in the struggle.

6. To use ILY for launching a plan of action for the eradication of illiteracy by the year 2000.

3. AUSTRALIAN BACKGROUND

3.1 Descriptions of Literacy

Literacy is a relative concept which encompasses a range of reading and writing skills. In international circles, the term basic literacy is used to indicate the ability to read and write your own name. The term functional literacy means the ability to read and write well enough to accomplish simple everyday reading and writing tasks in your particular society. For Australia the goal of functional literacy in English is essential but not adequate.

Literacy involves the integration of listening, speaking, reading, writing and critical thinking; it incorporates numeracy. It includes the cultural knowledge which enables a speaker, writer or reader to recognise and use language appropriate to different social situations. For an advanced technological society such as Australia, our goal must be an active literacy which allows people to use language to enhance their capacity to think, create and question, which helps them to participate more effectively in society.

3.2 Data

The best data available at this time indicates that Australia has a functional illiteracy rate in English of 10.3 per cent for the over fifteen population. This is made up of 3.7 per cent of the adult population of English-speaking background and 55.8 per cent of the non-English-speaking background adult population. These figures are comparable with survey findings in other Western industrialised countries.

In the total Asia Pacific region, UNESCO estimates that there are 660 million illiterates aged 15 and over which amounts to 75 per cent of the world's illiterate population. In addition, over 100 million primary school-aged children in the region have never enrolled in school.

According to the National Policy on Languages Report, 17,000 Australians were enrolled in adult literacy programs in 1986. Even if they were all of English-speaking background, which they were not, these people would represent only 4.5 per cent of the adult English-speaking background population which is estimated to be functionally illiterate. The provision of adult literacy programs in Australia is a relatively new and undeveloped phenomenon.

3.3 Reasons for Literacy Difficulties in the Adult Population

Reasons vary with the individuals concerned. Common factors include emotional disturbance during the usual childhood learning stage, poverty and other socio-economic barriers, illness or accidents, undetected sight or hearing problems, specific learning difficulties, slower development, frequent changes of school, rural isolation, inappropriate education, books and reading not encouraged at home, English not their first language, truancy and lack of interest in school and learning. Children can be exposed to all sorts of life trauma and only when they become independent adults might they make a second attempt at learning reading and writing skills. In addition, after schooling some people lose the limited skills they possessed because of prolonged periods of unemployment or lack of practice. As the literacy demands of a complex technological society and workforce increase, the need for lifelong literacy provision becomes more apparent.

3.4 Childhood Literacy Development

Clearly the major government literacy efforts in Australia will continue to occur during compulsory schooling for children. For the overwhelming majority of children satisfactory standards of literacy are achieved during this process.

Adult programs can act as a safety net for those whose childhood experiences in this area were not satisfactory. However, even with Australia's substantial achievements in childhood education, the need to monitor and develop quality in this area remains. The goal of active literacy, appropriate to the needs of our society, should be pursued for all.

There are some groups of socially disadvantaged children for whom extra learning support is required. Education should be responsive to the needs of different cultural groups and to different learning rates. The preparation of teachers through pre-service and in-service training should take account of literacy development across the curriculum and across education sectors.

The role of parents in supporting their children's learning to read is becoming more widely known and acknowledged. Understanding derived from adult experiences in learning to read and write successfully now needs to be shared with the experiences of childhood educators. As the UNESCO APPEAL (Asia Pacific Program of Education for All) program advocates, the "eradication of illiteracy" needs to be built on a combination of universal primary education and continuing lifelong education.

3.5 Adult Learning Experiences

During the last decade, a growing number of Australians have learned to read and write as adults. They speak of the experience in terms such as these: *The only way to go back to study was through a literacy program and this gave me an opening to a different society, a different way of life.* For adults who participate successfully in literacy programs the apprehension they have felt for so long because they could not read and write adequately often disappears. With this experience comes not only higher self-esteem but also a greater capacity to contribute to their families, their communities and their society. Sometimes this learning occurs with a voluntary tutor in a one-to-one relationship, supplemented by expert support staff, representing an effective partnership of community and government endeavour.

4. GOALS FOR ILY PROGRAM

4.1 Recognition of the Value of Reading and Writing

Literacy is a basic human right. The opportunity to read and write adequately through lifelong literacy provision should not be denied to any citizen. In our print-saturated society the costs of inadequate literacy skills are significant. Areas affected include employment and production, health and safety, social welfare, family life, crime, consumer rights and citizenship. Australia needs active literacy for all its citizens. In a world which is increasingly competitive economically, Australia cannot afford not to develop the education and training of its population to the maximum extent possible. Moreover, the creativity and cultural life of the community are enhanced through the development of the written word in its various forms. Through works of fact and fiction, we reflect on the meaning of experiences and strive to describe a better world.

4.2 Enhanced School Literacy Programs

While Australia has long had a system of successful universal schooling in which literacy is a basic goal, it is always possible to improve the quality of that program. It will be important for the ILY program to be involved with the *Strengthening Australia's Schools* exercise which is already underway between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories. Certain groups of children are more at-risk in terms of literacy development. Greater attention should be paid to their needs and learning experiences devised which are appropriate to their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. ILY goals should be integrated with other Government targets such as the commitment to remove the need for any child to live in poverty by 1990.

4.3 Expanded Learning Provision

Opportunities for people to have a second chance at learning to read and write adequately need to be available on a continuing basis. Programs should exist in a variety of settings to facilitate access by adults with sensitive learning needs. Particular disadvantaged groups such as workers-at-risk, undereducated welfare recipients, Aborigines, people with disabilities, migrants of non-English-speaking background, women, youth, prisoners and rurally isolated people may need different forms of provision.

Not all adults in the at-risk group will choose to make use of literacy programs at the one time, if in fact they ever do. However, specific targets should be set for reaching students as literacy planning is more advanced. The Commonwealth should play a role in stimulating and facilitating strategic development so that a stable, continuing base of adult literacy provision exists to provide access to further education and training for those most educationally disadvantaged in Australian society.

An effective and comprehensive labour market training strategy taking particular account of industry and award restructuring proposals cannot exist without on-going support from an adult literacy and basic education program. Literacy provision needs to be linked to the Government's social justice goals of equity, equality, access and participation. For some families a break in the poverty cycle will include the provision of basic learning opportunities for both the adults and the children in the family.

4.4 Improved Quality of Adult Literacy Provision

Because adult literacy programs have been established relatively recently in this country, there is an urgent need to further develop appropriate curriculum and methodology materials, to conduct staff development activities and to carry out research into ways of improving provision. Many of these activities could be implemented as discrete projects during International Literacy Year.

4.5 Greater Public Awareness and Participation

Literacy difficulties among the English-speaking background adult population in Australia have been largely a hidden problem. Both social justice and economic development considerations demand that adult literacy needs are addressed. The general community needs to be more aware and supportive of people with literacy difficulties and the stigma attached to people with inadequate reading and writing skills must be removed. Adults need to understand that it is possible to develop reading and writing skills as adults.

Different sections of the community, such as industry, the welfare sector and the media should be targetted for consciousness raising about these issues. Many voluntary community organisations can be of assistance in literacy development. Parents have a major role in children's literacy progress. All sections of society should be encouraged to be part of a national literacy strategy.

4.6 International and Regional Awareness and Activities

Australians need to be aware of the enormous literacy problems in other parts of the world, particularly in the Asia Pacific region. Australia has a role to play in assisting neighbouring countries to develop their literacy skills. Experiences can be shared and projects supported. Work begun in 1990 can be used as the basis for a continuing program.

4.7 Promotion of Plain English

Language can be used to empower people or to disempower them. Agencies, both government and private, should be encouraged to communicate with the public in plain English. More efficient and effective communication through the written word is achieved by the use of plain English.

4.8 Effective Links between Education Sectors

Different sectors in education such as primary schools, secondary schools, TAFE and universities have often operated in some isolation from each other. It would be to Australia's advantage if their various resources could be integrated as part of a national literacy effort. Experiences and research could be shared to the advantage of all.

5. STRATEGIES

5.1 Australian Literacy Charter

The Senate, noting International Literacy Day in 1988, has already passed a resolution which urges the Government to establish a national charter, endorsing the right of all Australians to have the opportunity to acquire literacy and numeracy as part of a lifelong learning process. The National Consultative Council supports this proposal.

5.2 Funded Program

The Council proposes a funded program for ILY large enough to give significant impetus to literacy development. These funds should be seen as a core budget for ILY from the Australian Government. They would be additional to existing literacy programs of Commonwealth, State and community agencies, both domestically and externally. Apart from the core program to be administered through the Department of Employment, Education and Training specifically for ILY, special activities to mark the Year should be organised by other agencies from their continuing operations and budgets. The Government's ILY program, with funding to be made available after the August 1989/90 budget, is expected to focus on projects of national significance, which can contribute to a developing strategy for literacy. Some of these projects may be carried out by State authorities. It is hoped that State Governments might make funds available for local ILY projects.

5.3 State ILY Councils

The Council urges that State Governments form broad-based consultative councils for ILY, to include people from government and non-government organisations. These councils should advise State Governments on their programs for ILY and on their continuing literacy efforts for the literacy decade.

5.4 Commonwealth and State Literacy Strategies

The Council commends the efforts already being made for literacy development and requests the Government to prepare a national literacy strategy in line with the UN objectives for ILY. State Governments should be encouraged to formulate state literacy stategies and a national strategy should be developed as a co-operative exercise between the Commonwealth and State Governments in consultation with the non-government sector. Such a strategy should provide for lifelong literacy learning and encompass activities wider than educational provision. Industry and community groups should be involved in developing the literacy and numeracy skills of the nation. By the end of 1990, a plan of action for a literacy decade should be developed.

5.5 Public Awareness and Participation Strategies

The Council supports the development of public awareness and participation strategies for ILY. These will need to cover a range of areas, including the media, industry and the community. For instance, adult literacy students should be encouraged to meet together, to identify their concerns, consolidate their experiences and bring them to public attention as part of an empowering process for educationally disadvantaged people.

5.6 Interaction with International and Regional Strategies

The Council supports the strengthening and development of international and regional structures and means of promoting literacy, and recognises the particular urgency of achieving universal literacy in Asia and the Pacific. It especially looks to international and regional co-operation through UNESCO and bilateral assistance through AIDAB.

5.7 Plain English Strategy

The Government needs to develop a Plain English strategy which includes all government departments. It should also encourage the private sector to adopt the use of plain English. Plain English is the other side of the literacy issue. A Plain English Strategy should ensure that public documents are as readable as possible. A number of key government departments which have most contact with the public might be involved in a pilot strategy to re-write one of their public documents which has caused significant difficulties. This exercise could be conducted early in the program of ILY activities.

5.8 Evaluation Strategy

The impact and success of the Year in achieving its objectives and goals needs to be measured through the development and implementation of an evaluation strategy. The successes and failures of the Year should be documented and elements of the program which will have continuing value should be noted.

6. PRIORITY FUNDING AREAS

At this stage the Council recommends the following four areas for priority funding:

	Allocations	*Percentage*
6.1	National Adult Literacy Projects (*see* UN Objectives 1 and 6)	40%
6.2	National Child and Community Literacy Projects (*see* UN Objective 3)	20%
6.3	Public Awareness Activities (*see* UN Objective 2)	20%
6.4	International Projects (*see* UN Objectives 4 and 5)	20%

Notes on Priority Funding Areas

6.1 These projects would focus on strengthening the incipient adult literacy provision in Australia. They would be directed to program innovations covering the target groups, to curriculum materials and methodology development, to research, data collection and staff development. Some projects could be specified and others allocated on an open submission basis, within guidelines. Both government and non-government bodies could apply.

6.2 Non-government bodies in particular would have the opportunity to submit for child and community literacy projects. This would increase popular participation in the Year and raise its profile, adding to community development. Guidelines would encourage links to be made between different areas of literacy activities, such as the wider reading community and the education sector. The literacy aspect of the *Strengthening Australia's Schools* exercise needs to be monitored to see where ILY involvement might be appropriate.

6.3 Such activities would include the development of a public relations strategy for the Year, publicitiy materials, publications and conferences. The ABC TV proposal, which might form a centrepiece of the ILY program, will be considered chiefly in this category.

6.4 Australia needs to assist international literacy development, particularly in the South Pacific region, in a careful and cohesive way, to develop projects which deliver quality literacy programs in both the child and adult areas and to promote closer exchange between practitioners in Australia and in the region.

7. LAUNCHING INTERNATIONAL LITERACY YEAR

The Council requests the Government to launch the preparations for the Year on 8 September 1989, which is International Literacy Day. This could occur at a major national forum to mark the mobilising of Australia's resources for the International Literacy Year. At the beginning of the actual Year, a more ceremonial launch could be organised.

National Consultative Council for
International Literacy Year

April 1989